

## Essay

### The sum of the parts Graeme Mitchison

Thirty years ago, Francis Crick, in his brilliant and combative little book *Of Molecules and Men* (Seattle: University of Washington; 1966), expounded what could be regarded as the biological reductionist's credo. The ultimate aim of a modern biologist, he said, should be to explain all biology in terms of physics and chemistry; in particular, it should be possible to explain the development of organisms and the function of higher nervous systems in these terms. The book was combative because he had an enemy to deal with: the organicists and vitalists who were plentiful in those days. It's probably fair to say that the battle against vitalism has been won, at any rate until another dark age engulfs us. But there are other forms of dissension from the outlook he expressed, and one of the aims of a recent CIBA Foundation Symposium — The Limits of Reductionism in Biology (London, 13–15 May 1997) — was to explore these.

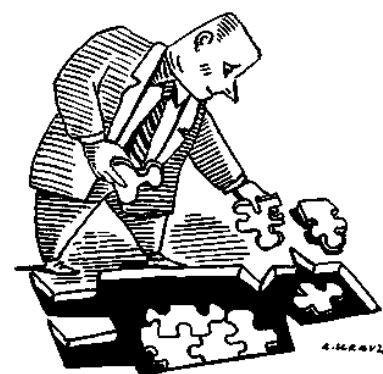
Those gathered at the meeting ranged from ardent pro-reductionists — our chairman Lewis Wolpert (University College London) being a distinguished example — to those with a large anti-reductionist axe to grind. In between were persons of less determinate disposition, many of them perhaps not even sure how reductionism should be defined. Fortunately, there was no shortage of definitions; by the end of the meeting, as many had been offered as there were bodies in the room, or perhaps rather more.

William Quinn, a physiologist who studies memory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, suggested that anyone who worked with a simplified model system and believed that Nature was

simple at heart was a reductionist. What he meant by simplification here was not entirely obvious: "Pavlov reduced dogs," he said, meaning that Pavlov treated his animals as stimulus-response machines, ignoring the fixations they developed towards pieces of experimental apparatus.

From a common-sense standpoint, reductionism means taking things apart in order to understand how they work. The 'understanding' aspect needs to be emphasized, as it is a frequent jibe against reductionism that it consists only in taking apart without any attempt at synthesis. Both components are needed. As Crick put it in *Of Molecules and Men*: "it would be difficult to deduce the detailed functions of a watch either from the intact, unopened running watch, or from the smashed pieces, but a combination of these two approaches would tell us most things about the mechanism."

It is, nevertheless, not entirely clear how much synthesis or integration is permitted before the subject moves into a realm beyond reductionism. Is statistical thermodynamics a reductionist subject? It has its reduced entities, namely particles, but a property like temperature — as the chemist Bob Williams (University of Oxford) repeatedly reminded us — is an ensemble property, not deducible from a single particle. Biological theory at present seems in no danger of losing sight of its constituents in this way, but a certain degree of abstraction is needed to grasp the behaviour of complicated systems. For example, Denis Noble (University of Oxford) has for many years studied the physiology of heart muscle cells in an incontestably reductionist mode, but is currently attempting to integrate the information he has obtained and model a region of the intact heart. His spectacular computer simulations yield insights not attainable by studying the individual components. "Am I a reductionist?" he asked, evidently anticipating a negative



response. "I've not a shadow of doubt you are," replied Wolpert.

Having failed to achieve unanimity on this matter of synthesis, we went on to do the same with levels of organization. No one thinks that it is sensible to try to reduce an organism to atoms; instead, one hopes to study it at several levels, each reducible to the preceding one. Take a frog snapping at a fly: one can analyse the synaptic pathway from retina to muscles, the molecular components of synapses can be teased apart, and the structures of these components can carry us to the level of atoms. But one would not try to put the whole structure together atom by atom.

Are there levels which are in some sense not attainable from those below? This would certainly constitute a limit on reductionism. From time to time, members of our group would deliver jobations about the impossibility of bringing reductionism to bear on the issue of purpose (such as, why the frog snaps at the fly), and these would be received with acquiescence. It's not clear, however, that this type of limitation pertains particularly to reductionism. Purpose carries us into questions of evolution, and evolution is part science and part history.

While these matters were being debated, Robert May (University of Oxford, and UK Government Chief Scientist) dropped in from the corridors of power to tell us about population biology. Muttering "I don't know what I'm doing here," he told us, not without a touch of

impatience, that one should work at whatever level was practical, and reduce as far as was possible. This sound advice leads one to speculate about the future of reductionism. What is practical, what is possible? Will we really be able to put together all the pieces being so energetically produced by the great laboratory-factories of the world?

The scientific world seems to divide into those who think that tasks which are too difficult for the present, like modelling large-scale cellular dynamics or folding proteins, must always be unachievable, and those who see it as only a matter of time before they become routine. History suggests it is safer to side with the latter view: heavier-than-air flying machines seem to be doing quite well nowadays, there are photographs of atoms in the journals every week, and so on. It was good, though, to have some dissent throughout the meeting. Judged by the criterion of liveliness, this was a four-star meeting.

Address: MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology, Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 2QH, UK.

## Correspondence

### Widespread eukaryotic sequences, highly similar to bacterial DNA polymerase I, looking for functions

Erik L.L. Sonnhammer  
and John C. Wootton

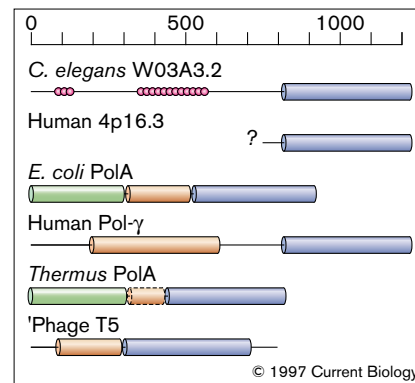
The sequence databases now contain several particularly interesting DNA polymerase sequences for which functions have not yet been assigned. These sequences are present and transcribed in

widespread eukaryotes. They are strongly similar in their polymerase domains to the familiar DNA polymerase I (PolA family) of the bacterial kingdom, and are only weakly similar to Pol- $\gamma$ , the enzyme responsible for mitochondrial DNA replication. Two distinct human sequences are so far available: first, a cDNA of a class that is also represented by *Caenorhabditis elegans* (nematode) genomic and cDNA sequences; second, an intriguing set of rather cryptic short exon sequences interspersed in the 4p16.3 (Huntington's disease) region [1] of the genome. Partial cDNAs, encoding parts of similar DNA polymerase domains, are also available from maize, *Zea mays*, and the malarial parasite *Plasmodium falciparum*. Similar sequences are notably absent, however, from the complete genome sequence of the yeast *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*.

Different classes of DNA-dependent DNA polymerases (EC 2.7.7.7) have well-established roles in DNA replication, repair, mutagenesis and recombination, and share structural similarity in their polymerase domains. The new sequences analysed here clearly belong to family A, as classified by polymerase domain sequence homology [2,3]. Family A polymerases have functions in: DNA repair, and RNA primer removal during lagging strand replication in bacteria (the PolA enzymes); DNA replication in eukaryotic mitochondria (the nuclear-encoded Pol- $\gamma$  group); and viral DNA replication in several bacteriophages [4,5]. All of these have 3'→5' and/or 5'→3' exonuclease domains on the amino-terminal side of the polymerase domain (Fig.1).

The most complete example of the new polymerase sequences is a conceptual translation from the *C. elegans* genome (coding region W03A3.2, Genbank U50184). This contains, in addition to the carboxy-terminal polymerase domain, a long amino-terminal region that

Figure 1



The DNA polymerase domain in family A occurs in combination with various other domains. DNA polymerase domains are colored blue, 3'→5' exonuclease domains are orange, and 5'→3' exonuclease domains are green. In *Thermus*, an inactive 'remnant' of the 3'→5' exonuclease domain is present [12] (dotted box). Swissprot accessions: *E. coli* PolA: P00582; Human Pol- $\gamma$ : P54098; *Thermus aquaticus* PolA: P19821; Bacteriophage T5: P19822. The amino-terminal portion of W03A3.2 lacks clear similarity to other sequences and contains two low-complexity regions (pink circles), which potentially divide it into three globular subdomains.

does not contain any recognizable sequence similarity to known exonucleases. Six independent cDNA clones are also available from *C. elegans*, covering both the amino-terminal and polymerase regions. No expressed sequence tags (ESTs) from other organisms match the amino-terminal region. The two human genes of this family are distantly related to each other. One is a partial cDNA (dbEST accession W00829), and is more similar in sequence to the *C. elegans* homolog than to the other human gene. The second human gene has been partially assembled conceptually by sequence similarity from 13 short exons interspersed over approximately 130 kilobases of a 2 megabase contig from the Huntington's disease region of 4p16.3.

Figure 2 shows the multiple alignment of these sequences and other DNA polymerase family A representatives, including the new *Z. mays* and *P. falciparum* partial cDNAs.

**Figure 2**

<i>C.elegans</i> W03A3.2	815	GASLOLEMSCQTVLNIIFYSGIVFDQALCNSE.....IYKTRKQIENLEENIWRLEYGKFNTHSSNEVANVLFYRL	885
<i>H.sapiens</i> 4p16.3		QLFRTLEPLIPILAXHEVASLLFSLSVRGWTAFLGVERLEVLTSLXKELEQEAHFVAGERFLITSNQOLREVKL.NF	
DPO1_ECOLI	524	NVFENTEMPLVPVLSRIERNGVKIDPKVLHNN.....SEELTLRLAELEKKAHETAGEEFNLSSTKQLQTILEKQ	594
<i>C.elegans</i> W03A3.2	886	G.LIYPETSGCKPKLRHLPTNKTILEQMNTQHPITVGKILEYRQIOHTLTQCTMPLAKFIGRIHCWFEMCTSTGRILTSVP	964
<i>H.sapiens</i> 4p16.3		G.SFIK...GI.SYSGXXLNAPRDLHPLPKIILEYRQVHKIKLTFVDG..LAVAMKKSGISSSTWQTCQVTCRLSAKH	
DPO1_ECOLI	595	GIKPLKKTFCGAPSTSEEVLEELALDYLPKVILEYRGLAKLKSTYTDKLP...MINFKTRGVHTSYHQAVTCATGRLSSTD	674
<i>C.elegans</i> W03A3.2	965	NLQNVPKRISSDGMASARQLFTANSENLLIGADYKOLETRVLAAHLSNDSN.....LVNLTSDRDLFEELSIOQ	1032
<i>H.sapiens</i> 4p16.3		-----LYLTDFSCIELEFRILTHLSGDPE.....LKLQFQESERDDVFSLTLSX	
<i>H.sapiens</i> W00829		SMRHAFVPPGGSGILADYSOLETRILAAHLSHRR.....LIQVLTGADVFRSTAAEW	
DPO1_ECOLI	675	NLQNTFVRNEECRRIRQATAPEDYVIVSADYSOLETRILMAHLSRDK.....GLLTAFAGEGKDIHRATAAEV	741
DPOG_YEAST	674	.....CSELSTQVKAPPGYCFVGALVDSEELWLASLVGDSIFNVHGGTAIGWMC...EGTKNEGTDLHTKT...AQI	740
<i>C.elegans</i> W03A3.2	1033	NFP.....RDVAKQOLCYGLIYCMGAKSLSELTR.....MSIEDAEKMLKAFAMFP...GVRSYINETKEKVCKEEPIS	1098
<i>H.sapiens</i> 4p16.3		XXX..DVPVEQVTHADREQTKKVYVAXXERLAAACLG....VPIQEAQFLESFLQYKKIKDFARAAIAQCHQTGCVV	
<i>H.sapiens</i> W00829		KMIPESEVGDDLQQAQKQICVGYIYCMGAKSLGEOMG.....IKENDACACYDSFKSRVTGY	
DPO1_ECOLI	742	FGLPLETVTSEQRSAKAINFCGLIYCMGAFGLARQLN....IPRKEAQKYMDFERYPCVLEYMERTRAQAKEQGYVE	816
DPOG_YEAST	741	LG.....CSRNEAKIFNYGRIYCGAGAFASQLKRFNPSLTDEETKKIANKLYENTCKTKRS.KLPKFKWYGGSES	811
<i>C.elegans</i> W03A3.2	1099	TIIGRRT.....IIKASGIGEEER.....ARIERVAVNYTIQCSASEIFKTAIVDIES..KIKEFGAQIVT...	1156
<i>H.sapiens</i> 4p16.3		SIMGRRR...PLPRIHAHQDLR.....AQAEQAVNFVVOCSAADLCKLAMIHVFT.AVAASHTLTARIVA...	
<i>Z.mays</i> T23354		.....APVOCSAADVAMCAMLXIDRNRRLKELGWTLTL...	
<i>P.falciparum</i> T09520		.....MNTPIQCAADIMKFSLLSCFSVNNNNIYNNKKLTKMN	
DPO1_ECOLI	817	TLDGRRL...YLEDIKSSNGARR.....AAEERAINAPMOCTAADIIRAMIAVDADWLQAEQPRVRMIM...	878
DPOG_YEAST	812	ILFNKLESTIAEQETPKTPVLCGGTYSLMKNLNRANSFLPSRINWALQSSGVDYLHLLCCSMBY..IIRKYNLEARCT...	888
<i>C.elegans</i> W03A3.2	1157	.....TTHDEVLVECEPIHVAASAESIENCMQNALSH...LPRVPMRVSMKTKRSWADLK	1208
<i>H.sapiens</i> 4p16.3		.....QHDELLFEVEDDQIPECA-----GVGLTSGCHQVPLKVSLSAGRSWGHLY	
<i>Z.mays</i> T23354		.....QVHDEVILEGFESE-VCGXSAKSIVVECMSPFYGTNI...KVDLAVKAKCAQNYAAK	
<i>P.falciparum</i> T09520		NINPLIIHKNAFLNPTNLILQVHDELLLESEHDATKYIIQLNPILENAF	
DPO1_ECOLI	879	.....QVHDELVEFEVHKDDVDVAKQIHQLMENCTR.....LDVPLLVVSGSCENTDQAH	928
DPOG_YEAST	889	.....SHDEIRFLVSEKD.....	902

Alignment of the DNA polymerase domains found in *C. elegans* W03A3.2, the human 4p16.3 gene, *E. coli* DNA polymerase I (Swissprot: DPO1\_ECOLI/P00582), *S. cerevisiae* Pol-γ (Swissprot: DPOG\_YEAST/P15801) and ESTs from human, maize and *Plasmodium*. The EST names indicate Genbank accession numbers. The two dashed

segments in the 4p16.3 gene indicate exons which are presumed necessary, but for which no likely candidates were found based on sequence similarity. X denotes uncertain exon boundaries. The dash in T23354 indicates a frameshift relative to the EST sequence. The multiple alignment was constructed manually based on BLAST2 [13] and TBLASTN [14]

alignments. The probability of observing the similarity to PolA by chance, computed using the BLASTP program [14], was <10<sup>-50</sup> for W03A3.2 and the 4p16.3 gene, and <10<sup>-6</sup> for each of the EST translations, when searched against the NCBI NR database. The exon structure of W03A3.2 in Genbank was altered according to EST evidence.

All these sequences contain the characteristic conserved residue patterns found in active DNA polymerase domains [6], and show a much greater similarity to PolA than does Pol-γ. Phylogenetic analysis indicates that both *C. elegans* W03A3.2 and the human 4p16.3 sequences are placed among the deeper branches of the PolA and bacteriophage sequences (not shown). Pairwise alignments using these eukaryotic sequences show only very remote homology to the mitochondrial Pol-γ group. The question of the evolutionary origins of these apparently ancient DNA polymerase lineages is completely open.

Recent bacterial contamination or recent transfers from bacterial or bacteriophage sources is evidently ruled out by the presence of these genes in diverse eukaryotes and by their characteristic exon-intron

genomic structures. Also, analysis by the Zinfo program [7] showed that the compositional statistics of the W03A3.2 coding sequence are typical for *C. elegans* but atypical for *E. coli*. The phylogeny and distribution, including the occurrence of at least two distantly related human paralogs, could be consistent with multiple ancient parallel transfer events as well as with a single ancient transfer, perhaps through the mitochondrial line, followed by more recent gene duplications. Some lineages, including Pol-γ, may have undergone phases of rapid evolution, together with loss of exonuclease domains and gain of other domains. Presumably, given the wide distribution in protist, plant and metazoan organisms, loss of these polymerase genes occurred in the ancestry of *S. cerevisiae*.

What are the possible functions of these DNA polymerases?

Experimental verification of polymerase activity is the next step, but in the interim it is tempting to consider DNA repair. It may be pertinent to investigate the repair of damage to mitochondrial DNA, which is poorly understood but which may have roles in the progression of cancer, diabetes and other chronic diseases [8–10]. A repair function is also consistent with the absence of these sequences in *S. cerevisiae*, as there are well-established differences in repair between this yeast and mammalian cells [11].

**References**

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Address: Computational Biology Branch,  
National Center for Biotechnology  
Information, National Library of Medicine,  
Building 38A, National Institutes of Health,  
Bethesda, Maryland 20894, USA.  
E-mail: sonnhhammer@ncbi.nlm.nih.gov;  
wootton@ncbi.nlm.nih.gov  
Correspondence: Erik LL Sonnhhammer

## Barth syndrome may be due to an acyltransferase deficiency

Andrew F. Neuwald

Barth syndrome is an X-linked inherited disorder characterized by short stature, cardioskeletal myopathy, neutropenia, abnormal

mitochondria, and respiratory-chain dysfunction [1,2]. It is often fatal in childhood due to cardiac failure or sepsis arising from agranulocytosis. The phenotype associated with this disorder is quite variable, however, and other X-linked cardiomyopathies [3–5] may be allelic to Barth syndrome, which maps to a gene-rich region of Xq28 [6]. Recently, a gene mutated in patients afflicted with Barth syndrome (*G4.5*) was cloned and sequenced [7]. It encodes several proteins (designated tafazzins) by means of alternate splicing. The biological function of tafazzins is unclear; a BLAST search [8] finds significant pairwise similarity only to two hypothetical proteins: one from worm (g1130664), and one from yeast (g1066481).

Here, I report that human tafazzins belong to a superfamily consisting of acyltransferases involved in phospholipid biosynthesis and other proteins of unknown function. This superfamily was found using PROBE [9], an automated search and multiple alignment program based on iterative database searches. Starting with a plant 1-acylglycerol-3-phosphate acyltransferase (EC 2.3.1.51), g1197334, PROBE returned a superfamily that includes known and putative acyltransferases from bacteria, fungi, plants, and vertebrate and invertebrate metazoans. Characterized enzymes in this superfamily all function in phospholipid biosynthesis and have either glycerolphosphate, 1-acylglycerolphosphate, or 2-acylglycerolphosphoethanolamine acyltransferase activity.

The sequence alignment contains five conserved regions that presumably reflect similar structural and functional features shared by these proteins (Fig. 1). As all of the characterized proteins are acyltransferases involved in phospholipid biosynthesis, the uncharacterized proteins are likely to have similar catalytic activity. Notably, motif A contains a fully

conserved residue position that may correspond to a catalytic histidine, as has been found at the active site of other CoA-dependent hydrolases [10]. Of course, it is possible that tafazzins perform some other hydrolytic function. Indeed, hydrolytic activity was previously predicted for tafazzins based on weak similarity to the *Escherichia coli radC* gene [11], which may possess hydrolytic activity needed for DNA repair. Nevertheless, the more extensive similarity of tafazzins to these acyltransferases implies a closer similarity in function.

The potential acyltransferase activity of tafazzins suggests a possible disease mechanism underlying Barth syndrome. Differential splicing of tafazzins [7] and the existence of at least nine of these putative acyltransferases in roundworm — by contrast with the four detected in the *E. coli* genome — suggests that a variety of substrate-specific or tissue- and organelle-specific forms of these acyltransferases exist in eukaryotes. If so, then the mitochondrial structural and respiratory-chain abnormalities associated with Barth syndrome may be due to alterations in mitochondrial membrane phospholipid composition. Consistent with this notion, a temperature-sensitive Chinese hamster ovary cell mutant deficient in an enzyme needed for cardiolipin biosynthesis showed alterations in mitochondrial morphology and respiration [12].

It is important to note that the roundworm ZK809.2 gene may be an ortholog of the human *G4.5* (tafazzins) gene. It shares several splice sites with the human gene and the predicted product is more closely related to tafazzins than to any other protein in the superfamily. Notably, the worm protein is missing exon 5, which appears to be removed from many of the tafazzin splice variants [7]. Furthermore, the worm homolog shares several conserved regions with human tafazzins that are



Figure 1

protein	start	Motif A	Motif B	Motif C	Motif D	Motif E	end	description												
g1263110	62	PLIRVSNHQS	CMDDPFLW	IL	(16)AADICF	TKELHSHFFS	SKGVVVR	(48)QDWV	IFPEGV	(8)FKAG	GLRLI	(19)VLPS	SPFY	227 (65)	tafazzin (human)					
g1130664	37	PLIRVSNHRS	IDDPFLMW	IL	(17)AHNIGF	TKQFHTM	PSLRGVPCVR	(18)NKWV	IFPEGV	(9)FKAG	GLRLV	(19)VLPS	SPFY	174 (74)	ZK809.2 (worm)					
g1066481	70	GLMTVSNHRS	IVDDPFLW	IL	(16)AHNIGF	QNKFLANFFS	LSQLSTER	(49)PSWV	IFPEGV	(13)FKAG	GLRMI	(40)ELVT	IGD	262 (119)	P9659.5 (yeast)					
g1458274	218	PALII	INHRTRL	LDLDFW	NAL	(14)LKEM	LYNPF	GAGMAMQ	AASYIFLDR	(21)KYQL	LLFPEGT	(26)PRV	GFVHI	(12)IYDV	SIGF	365 (158)	agpat (worm)			
S52645	85	BALII	SNHRS	IDDLITW	LA	(12)MKKSSK	FPVIG	SMMAE	YFLER	(21)PFWL	LLFPEGT	(26)PRV	GFVSA	(10)IYDT	TVIV	228 (146)	agpat (maize)			
g1197334	102	BALII	SNHRS	ISIDFF	WMLA	(7)AKKE	VIVW	PFLG	GLH	LAHH	IFDR	(20)NLSL	LMFPEGT	(35)WRNG	IFRVE	(0)EVPIT	IVY	238 (43)	agpat (vascular plant)	
P33333	75	PALII	ANHRS	QSLD	IFLGRIF	(7)AKKS	LYV	PFLG	NEMDL	SGYFLDR	(20)KRAL	LVFPEGT	(10)FKAG	AFHLA	(77)LLP	PAIEV	263 (40)	agpat (yeast)		
P26647	66	BALII	ANHRS	QNDV	TASIV	(7)GKSL	LLW	PPFG	LLH	FLG	LYFLDR	(20)RISI	LMFPEGT	(8)FKAG	AFHLA	(6)IIPV	VST	181 (64)	agpat (E.coli)	
D64223	85	EVLV	ANHRS	QSLD	LVLI	IKAF	(11)VKKL	LDK	IVL	FLM	MLD	GVFDR	(19)GTAI	LVFPEGT	(8)FKAG	AFHLA	(6)IIPV	SIGV	203 (65)	agpat (M.genitalium)
g972978	71	GLV	AAHRS	QSLD	IFRMSAVY	(5)AKDE	KSW	PVLG	MQAG	GVFIR	(19)QNVN	SFFPEGT	(10)FKAG	AFHLA	(6)VL	VALV	185 (72)	agpat (N.meningitidis)		
AA41672	223	PLLE	LEVHRS	IDVLL	ITL	(10)ASGN	NLNP	VFST	LLHKL	GFFIR	(28)QQFL	IFPEGT	(0)SRSG	KTSCA	(21)VIPV	ISY	356 (471)	gpat (mouse)		
g1458332	160	PVVL	LEVHRS	QSLD	ITLITCN	(10)ASGN	NLNL	SGGL	LRAT	GFFIR	(28)DMPI	IFPEGT	(8)PKNG	LISNV	(13)LVPS	VTV	293 (425)	gpat (worm)		
P30706	220	PLLE	SNHRS	QADDA	ITLITL	(38)SKKH	LDNF	FLM	KRHA	NTSRKE	(8)SQTI	LMFPEGT	(9)WAP	AFDSS	(17)IIPV	AILC	366 (91)	PlsB (PEA)		
P00482	319	ELVV	VECHRS	QSLD	ITLITV	(14)AAGI	LNFW	PAQ	PIFR	RLG	GFFIR	(22)GQIV	VEYF	VEGR	(8)PKNG	FLSMT	(13)LIPI	ITIG	446 (381)	PlsB (E.coli)
P31119	29	EVLI	TPNV	HS	IDVILL	IGFL	(20)LKSF	IDFV	PLD	PTOP	MAKHLVRLV	(2)GRV	VIFPEGT	(8)IYDG	AFHLA	(6)VIPV	ITIG	139 (580)	agpat (E.coli)	
g1841552	89	PV	VVSNHRS	QSLD	ITLITV	(7)AKEL	LWAGS	AGL	LAG	IFDR	(20)DVR	VVIFPEGT	(8)FKAG	AFHLA	(6)IVPI	VMS	204 (71)	ORF (human)		
g1503994	94	BAV	MLVNHRS	QATG	DVCLMCL	(12)LMDE	IFKYTN	FGIV	SLV	VEHGGF	(25)PRSG	AKTII	(30)IDDT	ITIR	259 (111)	KIAA0205 (human)				
g1256468	97	BALL	ENH	GLDF	FTTMAAA	(13)VIYN	WYIS	PLGL	WSSY	GNYFDS	(25)LRWL	LLFPEGT	(25)PRSG	AFHLA	(24)LVDT	VLGY	258 (105)	F08G5.2 (worm)		
g1301695	42	PAMIV	SNHRS	QADDA	ITLITL	(14)LKAL	LKIP	PSAG	FMMA	QVFLR	(21)KYCI	LLFPEGT	(26)PRV	GFHL	(37)IYDI	ITIV	214 (225)	F55A11.5 (worm)		
g1403001	91	PAV	VICNHRS	QSLD	ITLITV	(7)AKRI	LAY	PPFN	LGAY	FSNIFDR	(20)NLKL	LVFPEGT	(8)FKAG	AFHLA	(6)IIPV	VFS	206 (76)	T06E8.1 (worm)		
g1673483	87	PALII	ANHRS	QSLD	ITLITV	(7)LKSS	LYV	PPFN	LGAY	FSNIFDR	(20)KRKV	LVFPEGT	(8)FKAG	AFHLA	(6)IIPV	VFS	202 (3)	F59F4.4 (worm)		
g798827	237	GCIV	ANHRS	QSLD	ITLITV	(20)SRSE	HHW	FEGE	AGDR	AKVMDRM	(7)KLPI	IFPEGT	(8)FKAG	AFHLA	(2)IYPI	AVRV	348 (164)	R07E3.5 (worm)		
g746580	117	KOLL	ANHRS	QSLD	ITLITV	(12)VIYN	WYIS	PLGL	WSSY	GNYFDS	(24)YQW	VVIFPEGT	(25)PRSG	AFHLA	(24)IYDI	ITIV	276 (115)	C01C10.3 (worm)		
g1402600	149	TLM	ICNHRS	QADDA	ITLITL	(29)LKFL	WGM	FNPR	LL	IFDR	(18)NQAI	IFPEGT	(29)FKN	FTTMA	(79)IYDV	ITIV	378 (101)	YOR298w (yeast)		
P38226	105	NSV	ICNHRS	QADDA	ITLITL	(12)LKKS	SLAS	IPLG	FGMR	NYNIFDR	(4)PYNL	LLFPEGT	(4)TRKS	AKTIA	(32)LYDI	ITIV	281 (116)	Ybp2p (yeast)		
S54641	110	BALII	ANHRS	QADDA	ITLITL	(12)LKAL	LYV	PPFN	LGAY	FSNIFDR	(41)AYNL	LMFPEGT	(28)PKNG	AFHLA	(10)IYDV	ITIV	275 (121)	YD9335.04c (yeast)		
g1653690	57	PALVV	SNHRS	QADDA	ITLITL	(7)AKEL	ENVP	LLG	PAIR	LYVVKR	(17)GMLV	VVIFPEGT	(8)PKNG	AFHLA	(6)IIPV	SLG	169 (56)	ORF (Synechocystis)		
g1652948	64	PALL	AFHRS	QSLD	ITLITV	(7)LKKS	SLAS	IPLG	FGMR	NYNIFDR	(37)QYVL	AAAP	PEGT	(9)LEPG	LAQL	(17)IIPV	ITIV	208 (257)	ORF (Synechocystis)	
g1652152	54	PALII	ANHRS	QADDA	ITLITL	(3)VIGR	LLRF	MAV	TEV	QGLQ	GWFIR	(25)GMLV	VVIFPEGT	(9)FKAG	AFHLA	(13)VIPV	ITIV	178 (62)	ORF (Synechocystis)	
P32129	96	WLLI	ICNHRS	QADDA	ITLITL	(10)LKQ	LWV	PPFG	LLH	FLG	LYFLDR	(20)PTII	VNFPEGT	(18)PKAG	AFHLA	(10)LLNV	ITIV	238 (72)	YihG (E.coli)	
Q11167	143	BALVV	ANHRS	QADDA	ITLITL	(15)AADM	VLE	PVNG	EAAR	AGHTMACT	(9)GELT	VVIFPEGT	(14)FKAG	AFHLA	(7)IIPV	ITIV	262 (96)	YV29 (M. tuberculosis)		

Alignment of representative sequences in the tafazzins, or acyltransferase superfamily. A total of 53 proteins in the NCBI non-redundant database were detected by the PROBE search [9], which used default parameter settings. Conserved residues are highlighted in red (for the most conserved positions) or black. Numbers in parentheses are gap lengths. Human tafazzin is detected

at the  $p < 0.00001$  level of significance; this is based on a database search using an alignment lacking sequences with statistically significant pairwise similarity to tafazzins (that is, lacking sequences g1263110, g1130664, g1066481, g1841552, g1403001 and g1673483). (The database search and the  $p$ -value calculation were done as previously described [13].) Protein

identifiers are highlighted according to the following color scheme: black, tafazzin and close homologs; red, 1-acylglycerol-phosphate acyltransferases (agpat); blue, glycerolphosphate acyltransferases (gpat); green, 2-acylglycerolphosphoethanolamine acyltransferase (agpat); unhighlighted, proteins of unknown function.

unconserved in the superfamily as a whole. Thus, ZK809.2 mutants may serve as a useful model to explore the molecular mechanisms underlying Barth syndrome.

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Address: National Center for Biotechnology Information, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland 20894, USA.

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